

Bill Kaplan: GOP health care debacle

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On Friday, Trump and House Speaker Paul Ryan withdrew the so-called GOP replacement to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) because the bill did not have enough GOP votes to pass the House. “Repealing the Affordable Care Act was meant to be the first demonstration of the power and effectiveness of a unified Republican government. It has turned out to be a display of incompetence and cruelty” (New York Times). Why “incompetence”?

Trump early on proclaimed “I alone can fix it”. Conservative Washington Post columnist Jennifer Rubin opined: “This is the talk of 1930s fascists, tin pot dictators and snake oil salesmen.” Trump seemed to think bullying and glittering generalities could make up for his total lack of knowledge about health care policy. In February, Trump said: “Nobody knew that health care could be so complicated”. And, Ryan failed after 7 years to develop a consensus on a coherent GOP health care bill. Former Wisconsin Democratic Rep. Dave Obey said: “This shows what happens when you follow an ideologue (Ryan) who is mistaken as a legislator.” Then there is “cruelty”.

Trump tried to sell the GOP bill with lies: the ACA “covers very few people” (ACA covers over 20 million, including nearly 243,000 Wisconsinites) and “there will be no cuts to ... Medicaid”, but the failed GOP bill would have ended Medicaid expansion and cut Medicaid by \$880 billion, leading to a projected reduction in Medicaid enrollment of 14 million (Washington Post). Moreover, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said the GOP bill would result in a total of 24 million more uninsured. However, Ryan pontificated that the GOP health care plan was a “rendezvous with destiny”. Regular folks saw through the GOP flimflam.

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Nationally GOP legislators were confronted at town hall meetings by their constituents who benefited from the ACA. In Wisconsin, Citizen Action, Planned Parenthood and the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families did a superb job of explaining the ACA and building support for it. Regular folks turned out to challenge Wisconsin GOP members of Congress. Why? Many had ACA affordable quality private insurance: Green Bay / Appleton - 50,734; La Crosse / Eau Claire - 20,044; Madison - 36,958; Milwaukee - 95,195; and Wausau / Rhinelander - 22,576. They did not want to lose coverage (repeal of the ACA would result in 431,000 more uninsured in Wisconsin - Urban Institute).

While Wisconsin Republicans Governor Scott Walker and Senator Ron Johnson looked on detached, the Ryan-Trump health care bill went poof. Trump was no dealmaker and Ryan was Speaker in name only. A debacle for the GOP. Back in November, Wisconsin Democratic state Senator Fred Risser said of the national election results: "They've (GOP) got everything now, and so everything that happens they are responsible for and no one can blame the Democrats anymore"

There is another way. While Trump and Ryan were falling flat on their faces the GOP-led Kansas state legislature was moving to final passage of Medicaid expansion. Moderate Republicans and Democrats worked together for the common good. Are you listening Governor Walker?

— *Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C. for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.*